



# The Sift<sup>®</sup> News Goggles

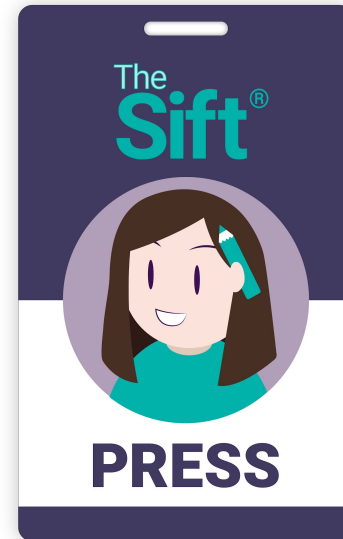
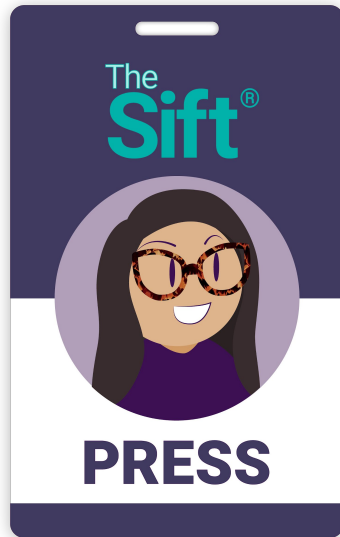
Quotes in news reports

Feb. 22, 2021

# First things first

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- Be sure to view these slides in presentation mode.
- Suzannah and Hannah, former reporters who work at NLP, are going to help you examine this topic through journalists' eyes.



Credible sources are fundamental to quality journalism. Journalists seek out the sources they determine are in the best position to provide relevant facts and details, including eyewitnesses, officials, experts and documents. Often this information appears in the form of quotes. Quoting sources can hold officials accountable, show audiences where key facts originated and add different voices to coverage.



But how do journalists decide which quotes to cite and where to put them? What kind of information is best conveyed by including direct quotes instead of paraphrasing them?

This week, let's take a look at the use of quotes in several recent stories on the deadly winter weather that left millions without power in Texas. Grab your news goggles!

Fort Worth  
Star-Telegram

WEATHER NEWS

# North Texans in 40-degree homes fear the unknown, oncoming snow: 'Misery takes over'

BY NICHOLE MANNA AND KAILY BROUSSARD

FEBRUARY 16, 2021 02:35 PM, UPDATED FEBRUARY 16, 2021 05:09 PM



The Steadman family lost power to their Fort Worth home in the early morning of Monday, February 15, 2021, and as of Tuesday evening still had no power. They decided to relocate to a family member's apartment until Oncor restores power. BY AMANDA MCCOY

Listen to this article now  
06:21 Powered by Trinity Audio

Here's the story! Did you notice the partial quote in this headline? It's common to pull important or telling phrases from quotes and use them in news headlines. Let's see where the full quote appears in this story!


Click [here](#) to read the full report.

## FORT WORTH

Firewood and other provisions the Steadman family purchased before the winter storm swept over Texas were not enough to keep them warm in their Fort Worth home.

By the time energy providers announced late Monday that some outages would continue indefinitely, the temperature in Elizabeth Steadman's home had fallen to 48 degrees. Her family lost power around 2 a.m. Monday. Steadman, 59, and her husband, Darrell, spent the morning kindling their fireplace and checking for any sign of an update. Their son, Michael, 25, who has Down syndrome, did not understand why the temperature had dropped.

The family's fireplace, which they suspected would keep them warm should the power go out, did not keep the house or their food warm as they planned. After receiving no clear answer when the power would return, they hunkered down at their daughter's apartment.



Oooh, this looks like an anecdotal "lede" to me. Each story begins with a lede (pronounced "lead"), and anecdotal ledes often set the scene by focusing on a particular person or place. Anecdotal ledes tell a story – or anecdote – to capture our interest. In this case, Star-Telegram journalists describe one family's struggle to keep warm. All these vivid details are building to the first quote!

“You just come to the point where the misery takes over and you’re cranky and you’re thinking, ‘If this doesn’t get better, I don’t know what we’re going to do,’” Steadman said on Tuesday.

The Steadmans are far from alone. More than 301,000 households were without power in Tarrant County on Tuesday morning. Many of those homes lost power more than 24 hours earlier and residents had to deal with single digit temperatures outside. As a whole, more than 4 million people were without power in Texas on Tuesday morning.

Here it is: The golden quote! This is the partial quote from the headline (“misery takes over”). Quotes like this one do a good job of illustrating and humanizing the issue at the heart of a story — in this case, residents without power — and are often located toward the top of a story, a few grafs (journalist-speak for “paragraphs”) in. The source of this quote is a person without power who can provide a firsthand account of the situation.





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In my newsroom, we sometimes called the first quote of a story the “voice of God” quote. These quotes may offer sweeping views of a story or point to some broader significance of why this issue matters. As reporters, we learn to listen for these quotes during interviews.



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Time for more journalism lingo! This first quote pivots to what newsrooms call the “nut graf.” It conveys, in a nutshell, what the story is about and provides context. By writing that the Steadmans “are far from alone,” the Star-Telegram shows how one family’s experience represents a much broader struggle in Texas as millions grappled with the aftermath of the winter weather.



# The Dallas Morning News

MORE FROM HOMEPAGE

Dallas' water is stable but other North Texas cities are warning to conserve or boil

Watch Live: Texas Gov. Greg Abbott holds news conference on state's power woes

Actual rotating outages could begin, full power restoration still not known, ERCOT says

Hospitals see rise in hypothermia cases, carbon monoxide poisonings as Texans struggle to stay warm

NEWS > WEATHER

# 'Texas is just not prepared': North Texans without power search for ways to stay warm

With another snowstorm forecast to arrive Tuesday night into Wednesday, thousands of North Texans resorted to other methods of staying warm.



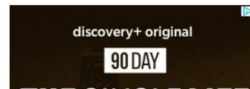
Jammie McGee walks back to her car after finding out the Motel 6 in North Arlington she reserved a room from doesn't have power. McGee said her Westmoreland Road apartment in Dallas lost electricity and water. (Juan Figueroa / Staff photographer)

By Nataly Keomoungkhoun, Charles Scudder, Sam Blum, Brooklynn Cooper and Michael Granberry  
5:23 PM on Feb 16, 2021



### Featured

- LIVE WEATHER UPDATES >
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Here's the story! Looks like there's another partial quote in the headline. But unlike the Star-Telegram report, this quote appears much later in the story. Reporters often work hard to craft compelling ledes, but they also try to end stories with memorable "kickers" and may rely on good quotes to do so. Let's take a closer look.

Click [here](#) to read the full report.

By 3 p.m., the power had come back on, but no one wanted to chance waiting in the cold with three infants and two pregnant teens.

Thana Hickman-Simmons, founder and executive director of Viola's House, had already booked rooms at the AC Hotel by Marriott downtown for Newton and the girls.

"Texas is just not prepared for this type of weather," Hickman-Simmons said.



The first part of this quote, "Texas is just not prepared," was used in the headline. Some good quotes are placed at the very end of the story and are called "kicker quotes." A kicker quote often offers an ending sentiment that sums up the news report. As a reporter/writer, it was sometimes frustrating to see a kicker quote used in the headline because doing so stole its thunder and could feel anticlimactic by the end of the story.



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According to the story, Viola's House is "an emergency placement center for young mothers." Hickman-Simmons, the founder and executive director of this organization, can offer an important perspective as a source on how the weather affected a particular group of people. Let's look at another news report for examples of other common types of credible sources!



KHOU 11



## Texas didn't learn its lesson | Experts say little has changed with winterization of generators since blackouts of 2011

Ten years ago, severe winter weather caused rolling blackouts, sparking a Senate hearing and a lot of outrage. However, some observers say not much has changed.



Author: Jeremy Rogalski  
Published: 7:24 PM CST February 16, 2021  
Updated: 11:48 PM CST February 16, 2021



Click [here](#) to read the full report.

Here's another story! This headline nods at a type of source that this report will likely quote and/or cite. Experts on topics are one type of source that journalists often include in news reports. We wonder who these "experts" are. Let's keep reading.





HOUSTON — Ten years ago this month, severe winter weather caused rolling blackouts, sparking a Senate hearing and a whole lot of outrage. However, some observers say not enough has actually changed.

Rewind time a decade ago, and the headline from the Texas State Senate was clear: "Lack of winterization led to blackouts."

At power plants across the state, this 350-page report concluded cold-weather preps were "either inadequate or not adequately followed."

Documents also serve as important sources for journalists and are commonly quoted in news reports. Documents can offer authoritative evidence that supports statements or facts in stories, but it's important to place such information in proper context so that readers can fully understand what documents mean.



"This was a failure from the get go." UH Energy Professor Ed Hirs said. "It's exactly what happened in 2011, the summertime generators were not available to come online. They haven't been winterized. They haven't been in hot oil. They haven't had antifreeze."

Why? Hirs and others say no state law was passed making winterization requirements mandatory. Instead, ERCOT, which manages the state power grid, made "recommended steps to prepare generators for extreme weather."

"We collaborate with generators and transmission owners on best practices for winter weatherization. So things have improved quite a bit since then," Leslie Sopko, ERCOT spokesperson, said.



The professor quoted here is considered an expert source — someone who specializes in a particular subject. Journalists often seek experts (who are independent and impartial about a particular story) to add important information that other sources can't provide.

The quoted ERCOT spokesperson is considered an official source, as a representative of an agency who is providing information in an official capacity.


“Because it costs money,” Dr. David Tuttle, UT Energy Institute, said.

He says the bottom line is the bottom line.

“How much do you want to pay to have that extra insurance,” he asked.

That will be a question for lawmakers, and earlier Gov. Greg Abbott has announced ERCOT reform will be an emergency item this session.

KHOU 11 News also tried to talk to state regulators, but a Public Utility Commission spokesperson said a full review of what went wrong will have to wait. The agency's top priority is getting power restored.



Here are two more sources! The first is another expert source. Tuttle’s involvement in the Energy Institute at The University of Texas at Austin lends credibility and authority to his comments on the state’s power grid problems.

The second source — Gov. Greg Abbott (we noticed a typo, which sometimes happens in breaking news reports) — is an official source. Rather than include a quote from the governor, this graf summarizes information from his recent announcement. KHOU 11 decided that the information was better paraphrased than quoted. It's important for journalists to attribute where information comes from, even if it doesn't appear in a quote.

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This graf raises an important point about fairness. In journalism, being fair includes making sure that all parties directly involved in or most affected by the topic being covered have had the opportunity to tell their side. In this case, KHOU 11 reached out to state regulators and cite a spokesperson — another type of official source — who told the news organization that “a full review of what went wrong will have to wait.”



KUT 90.5 (Austin)

# 'You're On Your Own': Thousands Of Austinites Without Power Try To Survive After State Electric Grid Fails

KUT 90.5 | By [Ashley Lopez](#)

Published February 16, 2021 at 4:55 PM CST



Here's another powerful quote that appears in a headline! Let's keep reading.

Click [here](#) to read the full report.





Diana Gomez and her boyfriend, Curtis Feronti, have been hunkered down in a powerless apartment in the Crestview neighborhood in Austin for almost two days.

Like millions of other Texans who lost power early Monday morning, Gomez is worried about the plummeting temperatures in the apartment.

“Right now it’s reading at 50 degrees,” she said after checking her thermostat.

Gomez and Feronti say they are mostly staying in a bedroom under the covers because it’s the warmest option right now.



Ooh, another anecdotal lede! Why do you think the reporter picked this quote to go first? Do you think it is effective? What is your reaction to learning that it was 50 degrees inside this couple’s apartment?



This is how a lot of people in Austin are trying to survive right now.

Cliona Gunter also lives in Crestview with her partner, Tony Beldock. They've gone more than 30 hours without power. Gunter said they have a working toilet and a gas stove – but that's about it.

“It's like it's 1850 in here,” she said.

Beldock said the stove is being used to cook their meals – as well to keep their extremities warm.



Love this quote! It's a great “color quote” — a quote that provides color and livens up a story. This quote is also short, punchy and says a lot in a few words — qualities that journalists look for when choosing which quotes to use in their reports. And it works better as a quote than it would paraphrased.





Hebert said she thinks governments should prepare our infrastructure, including the electric grid, under the assumption extreme weather will happen every five to 10 years – not once every 100 years.

She also said she wants to see more planning and preparation for events like this.

So many people in Austin were left to fend for themselves this week, she said.

“They just cut off a third of the city,” she said, “and just said, ‘You are on your own.’”



And here's the quote from the headline! Notice that it is in the kicker quote position, similar to The Dallas Morning News report. Why do you think the reporter chose to leave us with this final thought or sentiment?



**Note:** Texas news organizations [were praised](#) for providing crucial coverage while many on their staff worked without power and water, filing stories from their cars and sheds.

**Related:** [“Thank God for The Texas Tribune’: Power crisis shines light on local news”](#) (Kerry Flynn, CNN Business).



# News Goggles: Next steps

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**Discuss:** How should journalists decide what information to quote directly, rather than opting to summarize or paraphrase? What kind of quotes are the most effective or impactful?

**Idea:** Ask students to find a news story on the aftermath of the recent winter weather, either in Texas or in another part of the United States. Have students analyze the quotes in their chosen story and label the source type of each quote (eyewitness, officials, experts, documents, etc.). Is there a good variety of sources? Which quote is best and why? Where is the chosen quote located in the story? Do students agree with the order of the quotes? If they had written the news report, which quote would they have included first? Which one would they put last? Why?

**Resource:** [“Practicing Quality Journalism”](#) (NLP’s Checkology® virtual classroom).



The  
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This exercise originated in the Feb. 22, 2021, issue of The Sift® newsletter from the News Literacy Project. You can read archives of the newsletter and subscribe [here](#).



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